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SAN NICOLAS: MIGRANT WRITERS & POETS



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San Nicolas in Aruba has in my eyes always been an international community. Its better known as the city where all the immigrants from the Caribbean settled down in 1928. As a child you came into contact with those who speaks English, Spanish, Dutch or Papiamentu. All type of languages, which also have their own culture and have enriched our cultural life. In this connection, there is a relationship between migrant-literature and these migration-processes. The literary developments in San Nicolas started at the beginning of the last century. It was the poet Frederik Beaujon who in 1907 first wrote a poem and marked thus the beginning of the Aruban literature. It was the poem *Atardi* which in November 2007 we celebrated the 100-year-old existence of our literature. In addition, he wrote in November 1907 also the poem San Nicolas. What his considerations were, is difficult to identify. He must have foreseen that something was wrong with the development and distribution of wealth in this part of Aruba. San Nicolas has several writers and poets which in different decades had played a role.

1900: Frederick Beaujon

1940: Jose Ramon Vicioso

1960: Ireno Kock

1970: Jose Geerman, Angela Matthews.

1980: Filomena Wong, Lolita Euson, Burny Every, Pancho Geerman.

1990: Quito Nicolaas, G. Henriquez, Dax Hassel, Julio Maduro, Frida Domacasse.

2000: Ramon Sharp, Carmen Herera, Yubi Naar, Roland Peterson, Irma Grovell, Isaac Chin, Rosa Arenddell and Joan Lesly.



Irma Grovell The private and public sector has relied for a great deal on our New Arubians. First working in the oil-refinery, then the second generation was employed in the tourism-sector and the police department. Although the ethnic mobility in Aruba in the seventies and eighties can be qualified as very high, still we didn't see the emergence of several poets and writers at that time. This with the exception of Angela Matthews who wrote a single novel *De witte pest/The white plague* (1978) and Lolita Euson with her poetry volume *Sweet Praises* (1988). Very peculiar is the fact that each of the above mentioned poets, refer in their poems to different aspects of life in San Nicolas.



San Nicolas as a theme in itself, offers many points of reference which can be used in a novel. We might think about the historic contradiction between *P'ariba* and *P'abou di brug* (Up and downtown), the migrant society, the village etc.etc. Nevertheless San Nicolas has never been used as a background in existing Dutch-or Papiamentu novels. This with the exception of my own novel in 2004, *Tera di silencio/Land of silence*. I have used different sites in San Nicolas such as, the environment of the Victoria Bottling company, the office of the Gerardus used for a course in typing. The main scene in the novel constituted a tree, situated behind a house in the Prinsenstreet, where the boys after school and in their free time met each other. They played a game with stones and the geometrical figures these stones formed, determined the course of the story.

In migrant-literature we often find as its theme: the social context (poverty-unemployment) of the country of origin and the acceptance in the new country, i.e. USA, Canada, Great Britain and the Netherlands. Acceptance as a theme is then provided with the process of integration and assimilation which goes together with discrimination and racism. Also familiar with this theme

are their own experiences as migrants and then we are talking about racism and hostilities in the new country. A third theme which manifests more and more is the question of identity or displacement and cultural diversity in the metropolises.

The issue of racism is certainly true of the 1970's and still is a theme in the USA and European countries. In the Netherlands- where most of the Arubans left to, it still exist and nowadays has changed its face in that of marginalization. Soon as the situation is changing than we also see a different type of literature emerge. One example is Great Britain, where we can observe the brutal confrontation between Caribbean migrants in Brixton and the white police officers, lead to novels like *White Teeth*(2000) by Zadie Smith. Throughout the 60's and 70's we saw that more and more women were focussing on literature. Partly intended to make their story be told, but also in order to make a statement. Toni Morrison has written its entire life about slavery. Maya Angelou likewise is not unfamiliar with her trilogy and Alice Walker with its *Purple Rose* who was also filmed.



In the case of the San Nicolas-writers we can observe that none of our writers has dealt with the above mentioned issues or themes yet. They rather write in retrospection about their childhood. In this particular case I'm referring to writers like Irma Grovel with her *Parels uit de Cariben/Pearls out the Caribbean*(2008) and Rosa Arrendell with her *Dottie, de kleindochter van een oud slavin/Dotty, the granddaughter of an old slave* (2008). Remarkable both of them are living and wrote their book in the Netherlands. But why did all these developments abroad did not influence our writers back home?

Let's have to do with the integration process on the island. In the 50's we had for each migrant group their own club like The St. Maarten club, The Surinamese club, The Bonairian club, The Chinese club and the Golden Rock club for the Caribbeans. The integration process meant to be as a guidance of the different groups within their own boundaries. They were kept together in order to uphold their own culture and rituals, but they were not integrated in the Aruban society. Until the 70's the integration process didn't start yet, where besides working in the hotels they were elsewhere allocated. Nowadays you can find our migrants - if you can still speak of migrants - in the medical and the education sector, which implies an improvement of both their skills and job opportunities.



Joan Lesly

Secondly, Aruba had for a long time an isolated position within the Caribbean. This because of their lingua franca which is not English. Besides the fact that most of our authors dedicate themselves to poetry, it leaves us with four novelist. But then our authors prefer to write a Ego-document about the past and their experiences of a certain district such as Lago Heights in San Nicolas. In this case we can mention *E di dos paraiso/The second paradise* by Hubert Naar, which is a document based on oral history. Also Frida Winklaar published recently in Dutch her shortstories *Fontein en andere verhalen/Fontein and other stories* (2009) dealing this time with fairytales, legends and myths. Instead of writing it as novel with a structure, theme, characters and plot.

In the third place let us not forget that this situation has much to do at that time that the local culture was not yet ready to embrace other types of cultures. We must also keep in mind that in the sixties we still had in the USA the Martin Luther King movement for civil rights. The Aruban government policy at that time was oriented towards guidance and incorporation of the immigrants through their own facilities. Any hope we can expect from those novelists already living in the Netherlands. Their constraints is that Dutch Publishing houses are not so keen about black literature yet. Most publishers in the Netherlands prefer not to have lots of black writers in their fund and avoids the proces of black literature.

Although they are very good in sports like basketball and baseball, too many years were spent on identity-issues. In that sense our aspirant migrant-writers were too much concern with identity issues such as: are we Arubians, are we considered to be Arubians or must we published in Dutch, Papiamento or English? Since 1986 the Caribbean-Arubians are very much integrated in the Aruban society, not only they speak the lingua franca Papiamento but also they are married to an Aruban or moved out from San Nicolas and settled themselves in other districts as Noord and Santa Cruz.

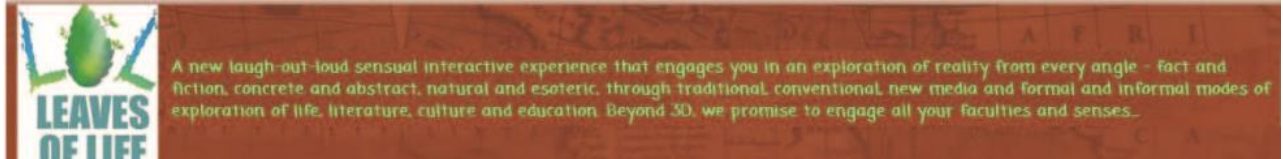
So then we will maintain two separate groups of San Nicolas writers. One which is still on the island, writing about local themes and a second group who will be struggling to get their novel published. It's therefore difficult to expect that their themes are by large the same as other Caribbean novels in the present. The question is when can we expect the first English novel by an Aruban writer?

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